

# the KODŌ beat

# 鼓童



*Playing through the rice fields on Sado's southwestern tip.*

## Kodo: In My Life for 30 Years

by Tam Stewart

*Longtime Kodo friend Tam Stewart works with the group as a communications adviser. The following is a personal account of his experiences with and impressions of Kodo over the years.*



I saw Kodo (then called *Ondekoza*) for the first time nearly thirty years ago in North Bennington, Vermont. They had run the Boston Marathon a few days

before, and had played taiko at the finish line. Now they were in the backyard of a professor's house, with the Green Mountains in the distance, and for some reason the sound of the taiko seemed right at home; as if it belonged.

As the taiko's voice rolled around that small Yankee village with its white houses and tall trees, I knew that something rare was taking place. I stood there with my girlfriend, a fellow student at Bennington College, who would later become my wife and the mother of our two grown children, and tried to figure out why so many things seemed to be merging: east and west, ancient and modern, her heart and mine.

I did not know until many years later that in old

**volume eighty-eight**

**spring 2009**



*Playing 'Chonlima' near Sawasaki.*

Japan, the boundaries of a village were often defined by the distances at which the taiko could still be heard. Somehow, that very evening, the edges of the Japanese village where this giant drum lived had extended to Vermont.

Several years later, in 1983, I stood on the deck of a Sado Kisen ferry and watched the mountains of Sado rise up from the sea. I was on assignment for GEO magazine and as the ship approached I was trying to figure out why it felt like I was coming home.

After two weeks living in the Kodo's schoolhouse home in Mano, and many photo shoots and interviews, I returned to the U.S., and wrote a story about a group of young people who ran, drummed, danced, laughed and loved life on their beautiful island in the Sea of Japan. With their gentle leader, *Hancho* (the late *Toshio Kawauchi*), who was full of vision, they seemed poised on the brink of greatness. As luck would have it, my article became a cover story for the French, German, and English language editions of GEO. It was a classic tipping point: audiences around the world soon embraced Kodo, and the rest is history.

My career as a journalist did not last long. I moved on to copywriting, graphic design, and communications for clients in many fields. Corinna, my wife, became a psychologist and studied Shingon Buddhism. We lived in a small town in the Green Mountains, raised our children, grew vegetables, drank Japanese tea by the woodstove, and the years passed.

In 2005 my son was twenty years old and anxious

to see Japan, so we devised an elaborate itinerary, but at the last moment I sent an e-mail to *Atsushi Sugano* at Kodo. He wrote back and asked, 'Why are you going to all those other places? We have all that here on Sado.' So I canceled the other plans and several weeks later was once again watching Sado emerge from the Sea of Japan. Beside me was my son, who was nearly as old as I had been on assignment for GEO.

It was Spring and not all the snow had melted from the mountain tops. One weekend, we all went walking in those mountains with the wildflowers and cool

breezes, and Atsushi explained how Kodo wished to give back to Sado, which was suffering economically. I said, 'It sounds like Vermont thirty years ago, but we built a visitor-based economy and are doing okay now.' Atsushi said, 'Can you put that in a memo?'

Two years later, I was visiting Sado every few months, helping build the foundations for a new economic engine. Despite global economic conditions, I believe the future is bright for Sado. There is much yet to do, but foundations have been laid. It is ready for the next opportunity.

This past year I have helped Kodo with various communications projects designed to raise and clarify Kodo's profile throughout the world. Sometimes, after returning home from Sado, I would wake in the night and not know whether I was in Japan or Vermont. But it really didn't matter. After all, as the taiko says, it's one earth.



*Chieko Kojima dancing on the lava-formed 'moonscape' in the fishing hamlet of Shukunegi near Kodo Village.*

# Interview with Isabel González

*Isabel González is Kodo's promoter in Spain & Portugal*



*(r. to l.) Isabel González, Kodo's Melanie Taylor, Isabel's son Carlos Sánchez and Kodo's Jun Akimoto.*

Though this is my first trip to Japan I have felt I should visit for a long time. Not knowing about Kodo's home base is the same as not really understanding them. And so I am very happy to have been able to see their home, Sado Island on this trip.

I first saw Kodo in 1989. It was through working on a project with their French promoter *Mr. Thomas Erdos* that I heard about them. At the time Kodo was active in Britain and Germany. I invited them a number of times to Spain but they weren't able to fit it into their busy touring schedule. We finally only managed to get them in 2006, so they still aren't widely known here.

Up to this point I have managed to introduce a variety of Japanese artists, including those from the

worlds of *Kabuki*, *Bunraku* and contemporary *Butoh* dance, so in spite of Japan being so physically distant I feel an extreme connection. The connection is that at the base of their expression there are powerful emotions inside. In Spanish culture they explode, and in Japanese they seep out from within. More than *reason* though, I feel that *passion* is the fundamental thing expressed in both cultures.

And there are other things that Spaniards can feel they have in common with Kodo. In the north of Spain is a place called *San Sebastian* where once a year, at their is a festival called *Tamborrada*, drums are beaten all day long. We also have an island where since ancient times drums have been used as a means of communication. Weddings, funerals, births and more are announced with them. As you can see, Spaniards are no strangers to drums.

Nowadays many taiko groups other than Kodo come to play in Spain, but there is a big difference. I think it is powerfully clear that it is extremely important for Kodo to have its base on Sado Island. Their lifestyle, the creation of their performance through endless practice upon practice is like a creed. It is difficult to describe in mere words, but if you attend a performance you will understand the difference in a single moment. I so much want for it to be made clear to Spanish audiences that Kodo is completely unique and that you must see them at least once in your life.



*At the new Taiko Festival in April at Kodo Village our home-made odaiko Yamaimo-kun (Spuddy) makes his entrance.*

*Photo by Taro Nishita. All other photo's (except for Tam Stewart's) are by Junko Susaki.*

Our sympathies go out to the victims and their families of the recent *Abruzzo* earthquake in Italy.

From May 2~31 the North American KASA Workshop Tour with *Yoshikazu & Yoko Fujimoto*.

Yoko will be holding a concert on June 6 in LA with *Derek*

*Nakamoto* to celebrate her *morisa komorisa* CD of Japanese lullabies. See web for details.

The *Asano Taiko* company is celebrating its 400th anniversary! A special anniversary concert including *Yoshikazu Fujimoto* will be held in Toyama on June 5. For details see: [www.asano.jp/blog/anniversary/concert/](http://www.asano.jp/blog/anniversary/concert/)

*Eiichi Saito's* 5 day taiko workshop will be held (in Japanese) at the Apprentice Centre, Sado Island Sept.30 - Oct.4.

Call *Michiko Chida* at 0259-81-4100. Application deadline June 30. ¥55,000 includes room, board and drumsticks.

Don't miss RESONANCE II on June 6 Tokyo, June 13 Kyoto, June 14, Osaka. A music/dance/art collaboration directed by *Kaoru Watanabe*, with tap dancer *Tamango*, singer *Mio Matsuda*, visual artist *D.H. Rosen*, et al. See [www.dhrosen.com](http://www.dhrosen.com)

# in brief...



## upcoming performances

### One Earth Tour Europe 'ekkyo/trans-border' May

- |                         |                                                                                                                                   |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 15 Firenze, Italy       | Teatro Verdi                                                                                                                      |
| 19 Reggio Emilia, Italy | Teatro Romolo Valli                                                                                                               |
| 23, 25, 26              |                                                                                                                                   |
| Rome, Italy             | Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia,<br>Sala Santa Cecilia<br>Kodo with L'Orchestra dell'Accademia<br>Nazionale di Santa Cecilia |
| 27 Rome, Italy          | Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia,<br>Sala Santa Cecilia<br>Kodo concert                                                       |

(Note: the May 24th date in Rome is cancelled.)

29,30 Milano, Italy Teatro degli Arcimboldi

### June

- |                        |                                       |
|------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 3 Zagreb, Croatia      | Kosarkaski Center                     |
| 6,7 London, UK         | Royal Festival Hall                   |
| 10,11 Athens, Greece   | The Athens Concert Hall               |
| 13 Izmir, Turkey       | Izmir International Festival          |
| 15,16 Istanbul, Turkey | Istanbul International Music Festival |
| 19 Munich, Germany     | Gasteig                               |
| 23,24 Lyon, France     | Les Nuits de Fourviere/Grand Theatre  |
| 27-30 Paris, France    | Théâtre du Châtelet                   |

### July

- |                          |                                                                                     |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 3 Torrelavega, Spain     | Teatro Municipal Concha<br>Espina                                                   |
| 4 Gijon, Spain           | La Laboral Escena                                                                   |
| 14 Zurich, Switzerland   | Live at Sunset, Dolder Eisbahn                                                      |
| 15 Montreux, Switzerland | Montreux Jazz Festival,<br>Auditorium Stravinski (tentative date/special programme) |
- Europe tour schedule may be subject to change.

### Earth Celebration 2009

This year's Shiroyama Concerts are collaborations of Kodo and Dutch rock group, *Bluf*. **Ticket sales start June 1st.** Official English web site is scheduled to open on May 20.

### Kodo 'Ubusuna'

Appearing: *Yoshikazu Fujimoto*, *Chieko Kojima*, *Yoko Fujimoto*, *Motofumi Yamaguchi*, *Eiichi Saito*, and 6 additional Kodo members

- |              |                                                        |
|--------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| Sep. 9 Osaka | National Bunraku Theatre<br>(Kokuritsu Bunraku Gekijo) |
| 11 Fukui     | Tsuruga Shimin Bunka Center                            |
| 13 Kyoto     | Chutan Bunka Kaikan                                    |

### 'DADAN' - produced by Tamasaburo Bando

Appearing: *Tomohiro Mitome*, *Yuichiro Funabashi*, *Mitsuru Ishizuka*, *Yosuke Oda*, *Masayuki Sakamoto*, *Kenta Nakagome*, *Tokio Takahashi*

Sep. 19 - 23 Tokyo Setagaya Public Theatre

### One Earth Tour Japan

#### October

- |              |                                      |
|--------------|--------------------------------------|
| 4 Miyagi     | Ishinomaki Shimin Kaikan             |
| 7 Ibaraki    | Hitachi Shimin Kaikan                |
| 9 Tokyo      | Nishiarai Bunka Hall, Adachi-ku      |
| 11 Saitama   | Hanno-shi Shimin Kaikan              |
| 15 Saga      | Saga Shimin Kaikan (Mizugae)         |
| 17 Kumamoto  | Kumamoto Kenritsu Gekijo Engeki Hall |
| 24 Kagoshima | Kagoshima Shimin Bunka Hall          |
| 25 Miyazaki  | Medikit Arts Center                  |
| 29 Fukuoka   | Acros Fukuoka                        |
| 31 Yamaguchi | Kikukawa Fureai Kaikan Abnir         |

#### November

- |            |                          |
|------------|--------------------------|
| 6 Kanagawa | Yokosuka Geijutsu Gekijo |
| 7 Tokyo    | Komae Ecorma Hall        |

### Attention members of Friends of Kodo

Advance ticket reservations for the autumn One Earth Tour Japan will begin in May. We will be in touch with details.

## Notice to Kodo Beat Readers

Kodo Beat is a newsletter focusing on the activities of Kodo and is sent quarterly to members of *Friends of Kodo*. *Friends of Kodo* is dedicated to bringing Kodo closer to our audience and fellow taiko enthusiasts. Membership is available to all. As well as receiving *Kodo Beat*, members also get special advance ticket reservations for selected concerts in Japan, the chance to buy original goods available only to them, and selected discounts on a range of Kodo goodies. For further information about these offers contact us or check our web site.

For those readers who only want the newsletter, an on-line version is available on the Internet.

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